

[From the American Prospect, May 25, 2001]

#### OUR MAN IN LITTLE HAVANA

THE SECRET COLD WAR HISTORY OF OTTO JUAN REICH, GEORGE W. BUSH'S FRIGHTENING NOMINEE FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE OF WESTERN HEMISPHERE AFFAIRS

(By Jason Vest)

It was the summer of 1985 and John Lantigua, then The Washington Post's Nicaragua stringer, discovered he had a new nickname, at least among American right-wingers: "Johnny Sandinista."

For many senior politicians in the Reagan Administration, Nicaragua was a black and white issue. If you weren't pro-Contra and anti-Sandinista, you were a dupe of two malevolent forces: What one senior official euphemistically called "the source" of evil in this hemisphere—Cuba—and the power behind Cuba that then Director of Central Intelligence William J. Casey held was the center of all world terrorism and subversion: the Soviet Union.

John Lantigua's reporting didn't reflect such a Manichean worldview, and for that, the Administration would try to smear him and others who didn't "come on-side." In a "report" produced by the far-right "media watchdog" group Accuracy in Media, Daniel James—identified only as a "Latin America expert," but, in fact, a longtime CIA contract propagandist—reported that, according to unnamed U.S. government officials, Lantigua was being furnished with live-in female Sandinista sex slaves in exchange for penning Sandinista agitprop.

To those who covered Central America, the charges were absurd: Not only was Lantigua living with his American fiancée, but he was in the middle of a freeze-out by the Sandinistas, who, along with the Reagan Administration, sometimes found Lantigua's reporting to be inconvenient. Lantigua got a kick out of the item, assuming that it had originated with Otto Reich, a particularly ideological State Department official who Lantigua and his Newsday colleague Morris Thompson had met for lunch when Reich had made a brief visit to "Venezuela's foreign policy does not depend on the ambassadors in Caracas." Eventually the U.S. prevailed on Venezuela to honor Reich's diplomatic credentials, though he wasn't an entirely beloved figure in Caracas: In 1989, for instance, the newspaper La Republica reported, with some umbrage, that Reich had turned the U.S. Embassy into something of a support base for the Panamanian Civic Crusade, an anti-Noriega group backed by the CIA.

In the view of Larry Birns, the head of Washington's Council on Hemispheric Affairs, the combination of Reich's hard-line views, current business connections, and Iran-Contra past would make him a disastrous choice to be the United States' point person for Latin America. "It would be of interest to anticipate the violent polemical struggle between Fortune 500 U.S. multinationals, most of whom denounced Helms-Burton for interfering with trade with Cuba, and the State Department's Latin American office under an ideologically driven Reich." (Birns is also alarmed at the prospect of Roger Noriega, another Jesse Helms favorite, being named Ambassador to the Organization of American States.)

"If confirmed, [Reich's] tenure will inevitably be littered with hemispheric vendettas, abusive run-ins with strong-willed regional leaders, and a cheerful indifference to state department rules and regulations," Birns says. "During his years in the public sector, Reich seemingly has found it against the very marrow of his personality and basic nature to be able to walk down a straight path. If [Secretary of State Colin] Powell con-

tinues to maintain that Reich and Noriega are the best qualified candidates to fill the vacancies, then the Secretary of State can expect to soon be hearing from Saturday Night Live."

[From the News Mexico, Jan. 20, 2001]

#### FAREWELL TO CLINTON, WELCOME TO BUSH BUSH SEEN AS MAN WHO CAN DO BUSINESS WITH MEXICO

(By Krista Larson)

WASHINGTON—Throughout his campaign, the former Texas governor who will become the 43rd president of the United States on Saturday emphasized his experience leading a border state with strong economic ties to its southern neighbor. He even demonstrated his Spanish in stump speeches.

As George W. Bush is inaugurated, experts say there appear to be new opportunities for improved bilateral relations between neighbors, but that potential obstacles also lie ahead.

"Obviously Mexico is going to be predominate on the radar screen, and that can result in more activity," said Armand Peschard-Sverdrup, director of the Mexico Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "With the more activity, chances are you could also have points of tension."

There is an image that Bush will be a "bigger ear in Washington" for Mexico-U.S. relations than in the past, said Larry Birns, director of the Council on Hemispheric Affairs.

"It may not easily play out in specific policies, but certainly in lingo and rhetoric the White House is going to refer to its relations with Mexico as being all-important," Birns said.

Bush's experience in Texas was cited by Peschard-Sverdrup as significant. "The border is definitely the frontline of the relationship," he said. "With Bush being a former border governor, he definitely has first hand experience of managing the relationship at the state level, and I think that's going to give him a better perspective than someone from a state that obviously doesn't have as much interaction with Mexico."

Bush has already met with President Vicente Fox when Fox traveled to the United States shortly after his July 2 presidential victory.

"The good thing is at least at the level of the presidency, there's an affinity toward each other's country and they personally seem to get along," Peschard-Sverdrup said. "Once you have that type of engagement at the presidential level, you would expect that would then transcend down to the Cabinet."

During his campaign, Bush said he had a vision for the two countries and declared that the United States is "destined to have a special relationship with Mexico, as clear and strong as we have had with Canada and Great Britain." He pledged in August to look south "not as an afterthought, but as a fundamental commitment of my presidency." And he said he'd "fulfill the promise of hemispheric free trade" by building on the North American Free Trade Agreement and other regional trade initiatives.

That doesn't mean the new administrations won't be without potential disagreements. "There are disruptive issues out there," said Birns, noting there will be pressure to address the certification process that has been an irritant to Mexicans for years. "Republicans are much less likely to eliminate the drug certification process than the Democrats would have been."

#### BUSH ON KEY ISSUES

Trade: Bush wants to restore fast-track negotiating authority and said his priorities will include expanding free trade "within our own hemisphere." Also plans to "vigorously

enforce" anti-dumping and laws to combat unfair trade practices.

Immigration: While Bush is strongly opposed to illegal immigration, he has said more should be done to welcome legal immigrants. He supports expanding temporary agricultural workers program and increasing the number of high-tech worker visas. He favors a six-month standard for processing immigration application and would encourage family reunification. He has said he would support legislation to divide the immigration and Naturalization Service into separate agencies for naturalization and for enforcement. He has also pledged that "with expanded patrols, we can make our borders something more than lines on a map." Wants to hire more agents and focus a reformed INS "on the job of defending our border."

Drugs: Bush has said that the United States is the market that sustains the narcotics trade and has pledged to improve interdiction. His "Southwest Border initiative" would provide 5 million dollars annually to reimburse border counties for prosecuting federal drug cases and would appoint a coordinator responsible for working with federal and local agencies.

[From the New York Times, May 6, 2001]

#### NEW CHALLENGE TO THE BOGOTÁ LEADERSHIP POOR REGION'S GOVERNORS UNITE TO OPPOSE DRUG PLAN AND SEEK AID

(By Juan Forero)

IBAGUE, Colombia—Normally, Guillermo Jaramillo, governor of a poor and debt-ridden province, could expect to be ignored by Colombia's highly centralized government in far off Bogotá.

It has been this way since colonial times, with the capital, high in the Andes, dictating policies as it sees fit, often regardless of the wishes of local officials.

But these days, Mr. Jaramillo and five like-minded governors—all from southern provinces mired in civil conflict and where most of the country's illicit drug crops are grown—have not only attracted the attention of Bogotá but also angered entrenched politicians who frown on insolent regional leaders.

The reason is that the governors, all of whom won office last October, have organized into a formidable political bloc that has harshly criticized the central government for everything from the handling of finances to the drug war.

That has embarrassed officials in Bogotá and highlighted the lack of support in rural Colombia for an American-financed program that largely relies on aerial defoliation to stamp out drug production.

Indeed, the governors have gone as far as Europe and Washington to criticize the program, which has destroyed coca fields across southern Colombia but displaced and alienated farmers.

The governors instead propose their own voluntary eradication program of coca and heroin poppy fields, and have sought out foreign governments for financing and technical expertise.

Most troubling to Bogotá, some of the governors have expressed the desire to hold their own talks with insurgencies that have been at war for years, leftist rebels and right-wing paramilitaries. Some in Bogotá, however, see such a proposal as nothing short of treason, since peace negotiations are held under the sole mandate of President Andrés Pastrana.

"This is a threat against the Constitution and against the peace process," said Robert Camacho, a Bogotá congressman.

Some Colombia experts say that the governors' efforts, while understandable in a